

Middle-school basketball player inspires, stars in original dance solo

BY RODOLFO ROMAN *SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD*

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Nautilus Middle School basketball player Izzi LieberPerson takes a break from rehearsing for 'Dov,' which plays Feb. 7 and 8 at MDC Live Arts Lab at Miami Dade College in downtown Miami.

Miami-based choreographer Pioneer Winter was planning to create a performance featuring dancers on treadmills when he saw a video posted to his friend's Facebook page of her son playing basketball.

Jenni Person, who is managing producer of MDC Live Arts at Miami Dade College, suggested to Winter that he work with her 13-year-old son, Izzi LieberPerson, who plays ball at Nautilus Middle School in Miami Beach but isn't a dancer.

Winter and Izzi met last June, and in November began rehearsing "Dov," a 20-minute solo work created by the choreographer using dance, monologue and basketball to show how the boy began to transition to a man.

"Dov," which mean "bear" in Hebrew, will be performed Thursday, Feb. 7, and Friday, Feb. 8, at the MDC Live Arts Lab at Miami Dade College. The original work has been created as part

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of MDC Live Arts' Live Arts Lab Alliance residency. Also on the bill: "Blasting Pixels" by filmmaker Claudio Marcotulli.

"I am directing a piece that pulls from the movement, body language and the vocabulary that he already has," Winter said of Izzi. "It is a theatrical work that has voiceovers that talk about different aspects about the game of basketball, and draws those parallels of real life, friendships, awareness of time. What does it mean to be a man?"

"It is interesting to me because he is 13 years old and I am 31 years old, so I see it as an interesting connection (13 and 31)," Winter said. "It is a way for him to look to the future and for me it's looking back and reflecting on my own childhood, but through Izzi. I told MDC Live that's the piece I wanted to do."

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Choreographer Pioneer Winter and Izzi LieberPerson rehearse for 'Dov,' which plays Feb. 7 and 8 at MDC Live Arts Lab at Miami Dade College in downtown Miami.

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Izzi is excited to step on stage. He said he has been challenged recently juggling school, basketball and his bar mitzvah. He is out on the court shooting hoops at 7 a.m. weekdays and practices basketball after school and on weekends.

“It came out of nowhere,” he said of performing in ‘Dov.’

“It is cool everyone is looking forward to watching me perform,” Izzi continued. “It’s been stressful sometimes because after a long day of school, I have to give a lot of effort at the rehearsal. It’s stressful because sometimes I want to go home and relax.”

Winter and Izzi rehearse about four hours a week.

Chaim LieberPerson, a museum educator at the Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU in South Beach, is proud of his son Izzi’s work ethic and basketball talents.

“I think that Izzi is fortunate to be able to explore his true passion in another modality, another domain,” he said. “I am thrilled with this opportunity for him to go in this direction. Most people stick to their domain.”

Winter said Izzi is the youngest person he has worked with.

“I didn’t know anything about basketball,” Winter said. “My interest is in his skill. He is a whiz kid.”

Izzi, who plays point guard and admires professional basketball players Stephen Curry, Allen Iverson and Kyrie Irving, said he will continue to pursue his passion for the sport, but won’t rule out performing on stage again.

“I see basketball like performing,” he said. “I can see performing, dancing and acting in the future, a little.”

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IF YOU GO

- What: MDC Live Arts presents “Dov” and “Blasting Pixels”
- When: 8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 7, and Friday, Feb. 8
- Where: MDC Live Arts Lab, Miami Dade College Wolfson Campus, Building 1, 300 NE Second Ave.
- Tickets: \$10. To purchase, visit mdclivearts.org